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ABSTRACT

The Echota trace their roots to the Chickamauga Cherokee of North Alabama. Today the Echota number 22,000 with a tribal council that administers tribal lands, supports a dance team, publishes a newsletter, and supervises an Indian education program. One of the tribe's objectives is to revitalize the Cherokee language. Working with Auburn University (Alabama), the council seeks to establish a database on tribal language resources and attitudes. The ultimate goal is to offer instruction in the Cherokee language through the Alabama public school system. This paper discusses the survey design and implications of the data gathered by a pretest for the future of the Echota language project. Since survey returns are incomplete, findings are only from the pretest. The pretest was returned from 21 individuals chosen by clan chiefs. Ages of pretest participants ranged from 15 to 69; 62 percent were male. Results of the pretest indicate that the survey instrument adequately measures the status of Cherokee language use among tribal members, assesses the linguistic attitudinal climate, and estimates the extent of support and participation that the proposed project will receive. The pretest also indicates that there is some degree of Cherokee language knowledge within the Echota population, and that the Echota envision both social and personal rewards from the reacquisition of the Cherokee language. An appendix contains the survey questionnaire. (SAS)

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The Echota Cherokee Language: Current Use and Opinions About Revival

Stacye Hathorn

The Echota trace their roots to the Chickamauga Cherokee of North Alabama. Today the Echota are 22,000 strong with a Tribal Council that administers tribal lands, supports a dance team, publishes a newsletter, and supervises an excellent Indian Education program. Among the objectives of the tribe's ongoing program of cultural preservation and renewal is a desire to reacquire the Cherokee language. The tribe, joined in an effort with Auburn University, seeks to establish a database on tribal language resources and attitudes. The ultimate goal of Echota leaders is to offer instruction in the Cherokee language through the Alabama public school system. To design a language program to meet the desires and needs of the Echota community a survey was designed to gather information on Native American language knowledge, language attitudes, and potential language use. This baseline survey forms part of the initial stage of the Echota Cherokee language project. As such, it will lay the ground work for the language revitalization efforts to follow. After the survey has been completed, the project leaders will have a reliable measure of Cherokee language use among tribal members and an estimate of the extent of support that the project will receive.

Members of the Echota Cherokee tribe trace their ancestry through the Chickamagua Cherokee, who seceded from the Cherokee Nation in 1777 over land cession issues. Older chiefs in favor of peace signed a treaty ceding a vast tract of Cherokee land to the state of South Carolina. Younger "rebellious" chiefs favored resistance to white encroachment. Refugees from South Carolina and dissidents led by these young chiefs established a settlement at Chickamagua Creek, in Southeastern Tennessee. By the year 1817 the U.S. Government recognized these Chickamagua as a separate Cherokee community.

Twelve years later tribal activities were driven underground by legislation enacted by the state of Alabama. This legislation outlawed Native American government, voided all contracts made with native Americans canceling all debts owed them, and made it illegal for Native Americans to testify in court against white people. Even though the U.S. Supreme Court ruled some of these laws unconstitutional, President Andrew Jackson refused to enforce the ruling, effectively sealing the fate of the Cherokee people. In 1838, after exhaustive efforts to change the removal treaty of New Echota, forced removal began and the bulk of the Cherokee Nation embarked upon the infamous Trail of Tears.

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The U.S. Government took the position that all Cherokee were removed to Oklahoma, however reservees, that is individual members of the Chickamagua Cherokee tribe who had been guaranteed land allotments under previous treaties, retained their properties. Many of these reservees were able to provide refuge for other Cherokees who had escaped removal. These Chickamagua Cherokee continued to be listed on tribal rolls; however, the severe social and economic costs of publicly acknowledging Native American identity compelled many to conceal their heritage. There is evidence that a sizable number of Cherokee remained in Alabama. The Hester Roll of 1884 documents only 17 Cherokee living in Alabama, and the 1910 U.S. Census listed only nine, yet a court of claims application in that same year documents a population of hundreds of Cherokee living in Alabama.

Today there are approximately 22,000 descendants of these Chickamagua and of the Cherokee refugees to whom they gave sanctuary living throughout the state. In 1980, these descendants reorganized under the name Echota Cherokee. The word *Echota* was chosen because it represents a Cherokee place of sanctuary and renewal. The Davis-Strong act of 1984 designated the Echota as a state recognized tribe. The tribal council administers tribal lands, supports the Echota dance team, and publishes a tribal newsletter. The tribe also supervises the Lawrence County Title IV Indian Education Program, which has received national recognition by governmental review boards as an Exemplary Program.

Among the many objectives of the tribe's ongoing program of cultural preservation and renewal is a desire to reacquire the Cherokee language. The tribe, joined in an effort with Auburn University, seeks to establish a database on tribal language resources and attitudes. The ultimate goal is to provide a knowledge base for Cherokee Revival in Alabama.

In order to design a maximally effective language program, the linguistic attitudes, needs, and desires of the Echota community must be identified. Dr. Robin Sabino, linguist at Auburn University associated with the Echota project, contacted me about designing a baseline survey that will meet these several needs for Alabama's largest Indian tribe. With the help of Dr. Sabino, colleagues in the sociology department, and members of the Echota tribe, I constructed a three page questionnaire to gather information on Cherokee language knowledge, Echota language attitudes, and potential Cherokee language use in Alabama. The survey has recently been mailed with the monthly tribal newsletter to the six Indian education programs for distribution to students' families. Participation is voluntary, although encouraged by the tribal council.

Echota Language Survey

This paper discusses the survey design and the implications of the data gathered by the pretest for the future of the Echota language project. As Crawford (1996) so aptly pointed out, if language shift reflects a change in societal and cultural values, then efforts to reverse language shifts must also consider these

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same values. Thus, from a broader perspective, it is important to inquire into the change in values that have placed the Echota upon the path to linguistic and cultural renewal. In this sense, the Echota survey (see Appendix) and the data gathered as a result of the survey will contribute to the overall body of information on assessment of linguistic attitudes.

Most Echota do not speak Cherokee, but each tribal member's input is important in order to design a program to best meet the needs of the entire tribe. In addition, some in the tribe have special language knowledge. For example, some members have living memory of the Cherokee language being spoken in their homes.

Purposes, goals, and rationale of the survey

Because we expect that the survey will identify individuals whose knowledge will be especially valuable to the tribe's effort, there is a space on each survey for tribal affiliation and role number. This will provide a way for the Tribal Council to contact these persons and request a follow up interview via telephone or in person. However, filling out the questionnaire does not obligate anyone to an interview. Anonymity will be preserved because I have not requested access to tribal roles. Because of the excellent working relationship between the University and the tribe, the tribe has agreed to make initial contact with those individuals who might provide useful follow up information. Thus, from my perspective, the questionnaires are anonymous.

The primary purpose of this survey is to assess the current knowledge and opinions of the Echota Cherokee of Alabama about their ancestral language, and to investigate the current status of the Cherokee language in terms of its use among the Echota. It is also important to determine the attitudes of tribal members toward the Cherokee language itself and its symbolic connotation for their own cultural identity.

The survey questions

In this section I discuss survey design, explaining the rationale behind some of the less obvious items. The surveys have only recently been distributed, and the bulk of the questionnaires have not yet been returned, thus I am limited to using the findings of the pretest as an illustration.

The questionnaire was pretested by 21 individuals chosen by the clan chiefs and approved by the tribal council, thus the pretest sample population was both small and self selecting. The ages of the respondents to the pretest range from 15 to 69, 62% of which are male. Only four of the six clans participated in the pretest with a large proportion (42%) of the participants coming from one particular clan. Echota clans are based on regional rather than the traditional, matrilineal kinship affiliations, so the pretest results may prove more representative of one particular region of Alabama than of the entire Echota tribe, which is distributed throughout the state.

Because of the small size of the sample and the fact that no random sampling method was used, it cannot be assumed that the results of the pretest will

reflect the result of the larger survey. Nevertheless the pretest has yielded interesting results. Four of the respondents reported childhood memory of a family member speaking Cherokee. This was unexpected due to the early acculturation of the Cherokee, the degree of intermarriage with whites, and the long time span within which those who remained in Alabama were compelled to deny their heritage. Interestingly, all of the Cherokee speakers named among family members were female, opening up the possibility of investigating Dorian's (1981) Grandmother principal. This information also raises the possibility of further exploring the role of gender in language death.

Another item explores experience with the Cherokee language outside the family. Fifty-two percent of the respondents said that they have been acquainted with someone other than a relative who spoke Cherokee. Three of the respondents knew someone who learned the Cherokee language in Alabama from another speaker of Cherokee. This suggests, that the Cherokee language survived at least into the present century in Alabama.

None of the respondents themselves currently speak the Cherokee language, but all expressed a desire to acquire it. None of the respondents reported ever having attended a Cherokee language class in the past; however, 48% said that they have studied the Cherokee language on their own, which indicates a level of personal motivation to reacquire their aboriginal language.

In the event that no native Alabama speakers of Cherokee are identified, the Echota will have to choose between learning the North Carolina (Eastern Band) or the Oklahoma dialect of Cherokee. Of those surveyed in the pretest, 52% said that they would prefer to learn the Eastern band dialect. The others did not state a preference. No one stated a preference for the Oklahoma dialect, which would be the cheapest and easiest route because there are instructional materials already available in that dialect.

Different individuals have different ideas of what constitutes language ability. To provide a more descriptive measure of language ability, I included a section that asked the respondents to rank their ability to understand, speak, read, and write the Cherokee language. I used a semantic differential scale from one to seven (1 representing fluency and 7 representing no ability). No one ranked themselves above four in any of the categories. All reported no writing ability. However, 19% of the respondents reported some ability to understand, 24% reported the ability to speak a minimal amount of Cherokee themselves, and 10% reported the ability to read a minimal amount of the written Cherokee language. Although the self-reported amount of language ability is modest among these respondents, it is more than anyone expected at the outset of the project. Furthermore, this knowledge provides a base to build upon and suggests that these respondents may have a realistic idea of the effort that language reacquisition will involve.

In order to understand the hierarchy of motivations that encouraged the Echota to initiate and participate in language revitalization and to get an idea of what the tribe hopes to achieve with its revitalization efforts, I included a section that asked the respondents to rank the top five reasons why they want to

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learn the Cherokee language. The respondents ranked having Cherokee ancestors and keeping Cherokee tradition alive most frequently as their primary incentive.

I used a Likert type ordinal scale of relative intensity for 13 questions as an indicator of language attitude. All of the respondents agree or strongly agree that the Cherokee language is worth learning and that the tribe should work hard to save it, in spite of the fact that 57% felt that Cherokee is a difficult language to learn. I believe these responses show a realistic view of the task ahead, with a conviction that the end result is worth the effort. Perhaps this is because 95% reported the opinion that knowledge of the Cherokee language is important to their identity as Echota Cherokee.

Of those surveyed, 95% felt that it is important that their children learn about their Cherokee heritage. While 86% felt that all Cherokee people, both children and adults, should be able to read books and publications written in Cherokee, and 76% felt that there is important information about the Cherokee culture written in the Cherokee language. No one surveyed in the pretest felt that preservation efforts are a waste of time and only one respondent feels that the preservation of the Cherokee language is unrealistic. Only one respondent felt that the Cherokee language is of no value in the modern world, though 24% felt that preserving Cherokee is looking backward instead of forward.

In order to avoid omitting important attitudinal information or motivations specific to the Echota tribe, I included an open ended question near the end of the survey, asking what advantages someone who can speak the Cherokee language might have. One respondent answered that learning Cherokee would give her a sense of self worth and accomplishment, in addition to imparting the ability "to communicate with the older ones who are still here with knowledge." Another said that it would give him the ability to preserve his own culture in his own language This particular statement brings up David Wolf's point about the loss of words for describing a part of a culture. Be it words referring to an aspect material culture or cultural practice, no genuine equivalent is available in the replacing language. Thus there is difficulty discussing that particular cultural item, making overall cultural revival that much more difficult.

One clan leader felt that the clan meetings should be conducted in the Cherokee language, while another man expressed the desire to preserve the traditions as they were passed down by the elders. Perhaps the most personal response was a desire to "pray to the creator and long past ancestor spirits." Along the same lines, several respondents expressed that learning the Cherokee language would make them feel more connected to the past and their heritage. Another respondent felt that the ability to speak the Cherokee language will make people recognize him as a Cherokee. Similarly, a third respondent said that it would give her "credibility" as a Cherokee. These last two responses may tap into motivations more unique to the Echota. Many Echota do not look like stereotypical Indians, owing to a largely mixed blood membership and a high degree of acculturation. These Echota may desire a badge of identity as Native Americans. Language serves as an excellent badge of cultural identity.

In addition to being physically nondistinctive, the Echota are a largely urban population that is physically spread out across the state. Many have acquired access to main stream education and jobs. The Echota are a people who were successful enough at blending in to remain behind in their homeland when other Native Americans were harassed into leaving or forcefully removed. Today their descendants want to reverse some of the cultural cost of that success.

Conclusion

The results of the pretest indicate that the survey instrument:

1. adequately measures the status of Cherokee language use among tribal members,
2. assesses the linguistic attitudinal climate, and
3. estimates the extent of support and participation that the proposed project will receive. In doing so, it lays the ground work for the Echota Cherokee language revitalization efforts to follow.

In addition, the pretest indicated that there is some degree of Cherokee language knowledge present within the Echota population. Perhaps there is enough knowledge to serve as a foundation to build upon for those individuals who possess that knowledge, or even to tap as an educational resource for those with no knowledge.

Finally the attitudes expressed in the pretest of this survey signify that the Echota envision both social and personal rewards with the reacquisition of the Cherokee language. These positive language attitudes coupled with the enthusiasm, dedication, and willingness to work for cultural revitalization exhibited by the entire Echota tribe in past efforts anticipates an optimistic future for the Echota Cherokee Language reacquisition project.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Here are a few general guidelines for answering the questionnaire: The questionnaire is divided into three sections to help you identify the topic of primary concern for the items in that series; Most of the items include several possible answers preceded by a number or code. Simply circle the number preceding the one answer which best describes your opinion, experience or behavior. In some questions, you will be asked to choose all of the answers which describe your experience, opinion or behavior from a list of options. Finally, there are a few items in which you are asked to write a brief answer which will convey your unique opinion, experience or behavior.

Part I—Experience with the Cherokee Language. The first section of the questionnaire deals with the experiences you may have had with the Cherokee language. Please read each question carefully and circle the number preceding **all** the experiences which apply.

1. When **you** were a child, did anyone in your family speak Cherokee?
   1. Paternal grandmother
   2. Paternal grandfather
   3. Maternal grandmother
   4. Maternal grandfather
   5. Mother
   6. Father
   7. Brother
   8. Sister
   9. Some other relative, please specify _____
   99. Don't know

2. Did any of the adults in your family speak Cherokee when **they** were a child?
   1. Paternal grandmother
   2. Paternal grandfather
   3. Maternal grandmother
   4. Maternal grandfather
   5. Mother
   6. Father
   7. Brother
   8. Sister
   9. Wife/Husband
   10. Some other relative, please specify
   99. Don't know

3. Were you ever acquainted with anyone, outside your family, who spoke Cherokee?
   1. Friend, how many? ____
   2. Co-worker, how many? ____
   3. Teacher, how many? ____
   4. Other, please specify _____

4. Do you know anyone who learned Cherokee in Alabama?
   1. Yes
   0. No

   4A. If **Yes**, were they male or female (Circle one)
   4B. If **Yes**, did they learn it. (Circle one)

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1. From another speaker of Cherokee
2. In a class
3. From a book
99. Don't know

5. If you do not currently speak Cherokee, would you like to learn? (Circle **one**)
   1. Yes, definitely (If yes, Go to Q7)
   2. Yes, probably (If yes, Go to Q7)
   3. No, probably not (If no, Go to Q7)
   0. No, definitely not (If no, Go to Q8)
   99. Don't know

6. If you were to learn Cherokee, would you prefer to learn it. (Circle **one**)
   1. from a North Carolina speaker of Cherokee.
   2. from an Oklahoma speaker of Cherokee.
   99. don't know

7. Have you ever attended a Cherokee language class? (Circle **one**)
   1. Yes
   0. No

   If **Yes**, where _____

8. Have you studied the Cherokee language on your own? (Circle **one**)
   1. Yes
   0. No

9. Do you currently speak Cherokee? (Circle **one**)
   1. Yes
   0. No

10. Rank your ability in Cherokee on a scale below. Circle 1 if you are fluent and circle 7 if you have no ability.
   A. Understanding Cherokee when some one else is speaking it
      1 2 3 4 5 6 7
      (Fluent) (No-Ability)
   B. Speaking Cherokee
      1 2 3 4 5 6 7
      (Fluent) (No-Ability)
   C. Reading Cherokee
      1 2 3 4 5 6 7
      (Fluent) (No-Ability)
   D. Writing Cherokee
      1 2 3 4 5 6 7
      (Fluent) (No-Ability)

11. If you were to learn Cherokee, the **top five** reasons would be...(Indicate the top five reasons by placing the numbers 1 through 5 in the blank to the left of your choice.)

__One or more of my ancestors were Cherokee.
__It's broadening to have more than one language.
__To better understand Cherokee culture.
__It would make me feel more a part of the Echota tribe.
__I would be able to read Cherokee books and documents.
__I would be able to read the bible in Cherokee.
__To better understand history from the Cherokee point of view.

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__I would be able to read current Cherokee publications.
__It's useful to have a "secret language" that not everyone else understands.
__It would help to keep Cherokee tradition alive.
__Some of my friends or neighbors speak Cherokee.
__I would be able to talk to Cherokee speakers from other parts of the U.S.
__Cherokee is a beautiful language.
__Other, please specify _____

Part II—The Cherokee Language. The second section of the questionnaire seeks your opinions about the Cherokee language and your Cherokee heritage. Please read each question carefully and choose a number from the scale which represents how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement. Then write it in the blank preceding that statement. .

Scale
1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neutral
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree
99. Don't know

__12. The Cherokee language is worth learning.
__13. As Echota, we should work hard to save the Cherokee language.
__14. It is important that my children learn about their Cherokee heritage.
__15. It's looking backward instead of forward to keep Cherokee alive.
__16. If I learn Cherokee, I will make plenty of chances to use it.
__17. Knowing how to speak Cherokee is of no value in the modern world.
__18. Cherokee is a difficult language to learn.
__19. Cherokees should be able to read books and publications written in Cherokee.
__20. There is important information about the Cherokee culture written in the Cherokee language.
__21. You cannot be a **real** Cherokee unless you speak the Cherokee language.
__22. As all members of the Echota Cherokee tribe speak English, it is a waste of time to keep up Cherokee.
__23. Preservation of the Cherokee language is an unrealistic idea.

Please read each of the following questions carefully and circle the **one** number for each question that most accurately describes your feeling.

24. How important is having knowledge of the Cherokee language to a person's identity as an **Echota** Cherokee?
1. Very important
2. Somewhat important
3. Not very important
4. Not important at all
99. Don't know

25. How interested are you in participating in a Cherokee language revitalization program for the Echota tribe?
1. Very interested
2. Somewhat interested
3. Not very interested
4. Not interested at all
99. Don't know

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26. What advantages might someone who can speak the Cherokee language have?

_____
_____
_____

Part III—Personal Background: The third section of the questionnaire contains a few items about you and your background. Please read each question carefully and circle the number preceding the **one** answer that best describes you.

27. To which of the Echota clans do you belong?

1. Bear Clan
2. Bird Clan
3. Blue Clan
4. Deer Clan
5. Long Hair Clan
6. Wolf Clan

28. Are you male or female? _____

29. How old were you on your last birthday? _____

30. How much Cherokee blood do you have? (Circle **one**)

1. Full blood
2. Half
3. Quarter
4. Eighth
5. Sixteenth
6. Less than sixteenth
7. None
99. Don't know

31. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

1. Have not completed high school
2. Completed high school or equivalent
3. Some college or vocational school
4. Completed vocational school or a two year college degree
5. Completed military training
6. Pursuing a four year college degree
7. Completed a four year college degree
8. Pursuing a graduate or professional degree
9. Completed a graduate or professional degree

32. Which of these categories comes closest to the type of place where you currently live?

1. In open country but not on a farm
2. On a farm
3. In a small city or town (under 50,000)
4. In a medium sized city (50,000-250,000)
5. In a suburb near a large city (over 250,000)
6. In a large city (over 250,000)
99. Don't know

33. Tribal affiliation _____

34. Tribal role number _____

35. Zip code _____